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ABSTRACT

The report documents evaluation by the Office of Educational Assessment of first year (1983-84) implementation by the New York City school system of the Least Restrictive Placement Personnel Training Program. Program goals were to develop and field-test training materials for a population of approximately 700 special and general education teachers, school administrators, and clinical staff. The "turn-key trainers" model in which a core of volunteer teachers are trained to provide training for building colleagues was implemented. Training consisted of a sequence of individual sessions exploring themes related to the movement of handicapped students to less restrictive environments. Analysis of participant interviews and questionnaires indicated participants (N=700) had favorable responses to the usefulness of the information presented and the opportunity to exchange and express their ideas. Recommendations for increased program effectiveness include: (1) expand the turn-key trainers model to include more target schools; (2) provide more intensive training for trainers; (3) schedule meetings after regular school hours and compensate turn-key teachers for their time. (DB)

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Less Restrictive Placement
Personnel Training

1983-84

OEA Evaluation Report

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FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

July, 1986

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Less Restrictive Placement
Personnel Training

1983-84

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SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training (L.R.P.) was designed to facilitate the transfer of students eligible for transfer to less restrictive placements both within special education and from special to general education. The program's goals in this first year of implementation were to develop and field-test training materials for a select population of approximately 700 special and general education teachers, school administrators, and clinical staff in the Queens and Brooklyn East regions. Two coordinators from the Division of Special Education (D.S.E.) were responsible for implementing the program.

LRP coordinators instituted a "turn-key trainers" model in which a core of volunteer teachers were trained to provide training for their building colleagues. With turn-key trainer feedback on the effectiveness of the training modules in their schools, L.R.P. coordinators were able to make ongoing modifications in program content and thereby respond more directly to the needs and concerns of the teachers.

Training consisted of a sequence of individual sessions exploring themes related to the movement of students to less restrictive environments. The objectives of the training focused on providing participants with the information, skills, and strategies needed to evaluate and foster student movement to less restrictive placements.

All groups targeted for participation in L.R.P. received training as proposed. According to participant interviews and questionnaires assessing workshop effectiveness, participants commented favorably on the usefulness of the information presented in the workshops as well as on the opportunity afforded them by the workshops to exchange and express their ideas. An assessment of the participants' knowledge and attitudes, however, proved inconclusive due to difficulties with data collection during this first year of the program. Only a small number of the personnel served by the program completed both the knowledge and the attitude questionnaires developed by the Office of Educational Assessment.

The following recommendations are offered for increased program effectiveness:

- Expand the turn-key trainers model to include more target schools.
- Provide more intensive training to enable trainers to fully master the content they will be expected to impart to their colleagues.
- Schedule meetings after regular school hours and compensate turn-key teachers for their time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Staff	1
	Program Objectives	2
	Population Served	3
	Program Activities	4
II.	METHODOLOGY	7
	Evaluation of Program Implementation	7
	Evaluation of Knowledge and Attitudes	7
	Subjects	7
	Instruments	7
III.	FINDINGS	9
	Qualitative Findings	9
	Program Strengths	9
	Program Limitations	10
	Quantitative Findings	10
IV.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	14

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
TABLE 1	Achievement of Program and Comparison Groups on Knowledge and Attitude Inventories	12
TABLE 2	Significance of the Difference Between Pre-and Post-Test Scores for Program and Comparison Groups	13

I. INTRODUCTION

Less Restrictive Placement Personnel Training (L.R.P.) was designed to facilitate the preparation of special education students for successful transition into, and maintenance in, less restrictive placements through the development and implementation of a trainer-of-trainers model. The program in its first and pilot year developed in-service training materials focusing on improving teacher knowledge and attitudes. Two coordinators planned and organized L.R.P. activities under the auspices of the Division of Special Education's (D.S.E.) Office of Staff Development.

In the first of its three funding years, the program goal was to field-test the training for 700 administrators, teachers, and parents in special and general education. In the second and third years, project staff plan to train approximately 2,000 special education teachers, 300 special education administrators, 1,000 clinicians, 400 general administrators, and 3,000 general education teachers and support staff.

STAFF

Two coordinators were assigned to the L.R.P. project. One had a doctorate in psychology and held a license as a school psychologist. The other had a doctorate in administration and supervision and held a license as a special education teacher. Both had experience in the field. Their responsibilities included coordinating and organizing the program; developing training modules; scheduling the training agenda; organizing committee meetings with regional staff development personnel, central headquarters experts, and Fordham University consultants; assisting regional staff development personnel in implementing the training

agenda; maintaining program standards through observations and conferences; consulting with on-site trainers; coordinating the testing component and data collection; establishing and maintaining project records; coordinating selection, purchase and distribution of training materials; coordinating project dissemination activities. A consultant from Fordham University in conjunction with D.S.E. staff development personnel worked with the coordinators in designing, reviewing, and evaluating the L.R.P. training modules.

The coordinators mobilized a network of volunteer teacher trainers from each school. Using a "turn-key" trainer model, the L.R.P. coordinators trained a cadre of teachers who then held sessions for their building colleagues who volunteered to be trained. The coordinators introduced each module, distributed training packets, and discussed appro priate dissemination techniques. The coordinators and turn-key trainers reviewed the effectiveness of modules from early sessions. This feedback was then incorporated into the planning of subsequent sessions.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The training had the following objectives.

- to increase participants' awareness of the importance of transferring students to less restrictive environments;
- to provide participants with additional information on the process of transferring students who are ready for a less restrictive placement;
- to increase participants' ability to more accurately evaluate a potential candidate for a less restrictive placement;
- to train participants to determine the appropriate next placement for a student; and
- to help participants develop strategies to foster student development of abilities and behaviors appropriate to less restrictive placements.

These objectives were then modified by the coordinators in accordance with the varying needs of each target group.

POPULATION SERVED

In the original program plans, seven groups of school staff and other support personnel were identified as target groups for participation in the training project. The first-year plans called for training the following number of personnel: School-Based Support Teams (S.B.S.T.) (n=72); special education classroom teachers and special education resource room teachers (n=200); special education supervisors and principals (n=30); general education principals (n=60); general education teachers, general education guidance counselors, teacher trainers and other support staff (n=350). These projections had been based on the pre-program strategy of providing L.R.P. training through regional trainers.

Over the course of the 1983-1984 academic year, the coordinators trained about 300 teachers, 16 principals, 13 special education supervisors, six Committee on the Handicapped chairpersons, eight clinical supervisors, and approximately 16 Chapter I trainers. Additionally, at the New York City-sponsored "Building Bridges Conference," the coordinators conducted a dissemination session to approximately 15 participants. Beyond this, forty-nine turn-key trainers (including 22 special education teachers and 24 general education teachers) presented the program to 708 teachers and 90 paraprofessionals.

The coordinators focused their efforts on turn-key training and on regional and district staff orientations. At these introductory workshops, the coordinators presented the general purposes and methods of the program.

The local personnel then determined the appropriateness of the training for specific schools.

The L.R.P. turn-key trainer model was offered in the Queens and Brooklyn East regions because they had instituted the 200.6 continuum of services. The deputy assistant superintendent (D.A.S.) in each region identified 16 schools to be included in the project.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

As the coordinators began disseminating materials to the turn-key trainers based on the project's goals and objectives, they received feedback that the content should better address the needs of the target population. As a result of this field information, and in consultation with an in-house advisory committee primarily made up of building principals the training modules were modified to focus more sharply on the development of better com munication between general and special education teachers. Since most of the turn-key training was offered by teams consisting of a general and a special education teacher, the program was well-structured to address these issues.

According to feedback from early sessions, participating general and special education teachers understood their role in supporting students making a transition to new placements, but felt they needed greater opportunities to discuss specific placement issues. As a result, the theme of the training became "L.R.P.: BUILDING NETWORKS" which focused on providing school personnel with the necessary skills to communicate effectively with one another in order to facilitate the movement of students into less restrictive placements.

The content as well as the process of the workshops reflected this shift in focus. More emphasis was placed on participants discussing and sharing ideas. At district level training sessions, the coordinators provided joint ad ministrative sessions for principals and supervisors on introducing the project and exploring administrative concerns; methods for gathering information on the impact of L.R.P. in the school; and information for S.B.S.T.s on expanding their role in facilitating the placement of students in less restrictive learning environments.

After the coordinators developed six instructional modules, the turn-key trainers presented the material at a series of school workshop sessions. The modules, comprising a trainers' guide, were: 1) exploring teacher expectations; 2) communicating expectations between general and special education teachers; 3) exploring mainstreamed student's learning styles; 4) preparing students for the transition; 5) sensitizing personnel to the mainstreamed students' feelings; and 6) providing strategies for maintaining the less restrictive placement.

Coordinators conducted initial information sessions with principals of the target schools to share the format and content of L.R.P. with them. The principals then disseminated this information to their faculty members. Coordinators presented a preliminary information session to all school personnel, provided one workshop for principals, special education supervisors, and turn-key trainers. The turn-key trainers then offered the six sessions to teachers, usually during their lunch periods or after school on a volunteer basis.

Teachers designated as turn-key trainers participated in central planning and training development sessions which also served as training

sessions for them. They were compensated for on an hourly basis. However teachers in each building who were trained in the L.R.P. program on a voluntary basis received no remuneration. These sessions were conducted for about 40 minutes each, and were scheduled on a bi-monthly basis.

Following a discussion of methodology in Chapter II, this report presents program findings in Chapter III, and conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter.

II. METHODOLOGY

To assess the extent and quality of program implementation, Office of Educational Assessment (O.E.A.) field consultants observed L.R.P. coordinators' training sessions. In addition, O.E.A. personnel conducted interviews with school principals and turn-key trainers. The knowledge and attitudes toward mainstreaming of classroom teachers who received training were assessed through the administration of a pre- and post-program questionnaire.

FINDINGS ON PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Field consultants conducted a series of interviews and observations at representative sites. They interviewed 15 principals and 30 turn-key trainers. In addition, they observed 10 training workshop sessions.

EVALUATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

Subjects

All classroom teachers who received turn-key training were identified as the target population. They were expected to complete pre- and post-program questionnaires, administered at the first and last training sessions, on their knowledge and attitudes about less restrictive placement.

Instruments

Participant's knowledge was assessed in a questionnaire containing three short case histories of children ready for participation in a less restrictive setting, each accompanied by four multiple choice items (five options per item) directly addressing pertinent issues related to mainstreaming decisions.

Attitudes toward mainstreaming were assessed by means of an eight-item mainstreaming attitude inventory, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). O.E.A. developed two forms containing parallel knowledge and attitude items. Participants were administered both forms, one as a pre-test and the second as a post-test.

Pre-test data were collected from L.R.P. participants during the first session. Dates of collection varied in accordance with the time the project was initiated at the particular site. Post-data were collected on the final day of training, after the last module had been completed.

III. FINDINGS

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Program Strengths

L.R.P. was field-based, with coordinators working closely with teachers and administrators. According to field observations, the program was responsive to the needs of participants. The coordinators consulted with the turn-key trainers with regard to the needs of the participating teachers and then used this information to modify the L.R.P. training modules.

The turn-key trainers were a real asset to the program. As members of participating school staffs, they were on hand to immediately resolve problems; that is, they could use their know ledge of actual school life to provide concrete examples of theoretical concerns raised in the training sessions. Additionally, since they were accepted as colleagues, they were effective in overcoming participant resistance at training sessions.

During L.R.P. workshop sessions, special and general education teachers had an opportunity to exchange ideas. In a number of cases, teachers reported that these sessions provided the first forum for general and special education teachers to discuss their respective perspectives and concerns.

Participating L.R.P. turn-key trainers provided very positive feedback about the coordinators. O.E.A. field personnel observed that the coordinators were clear in their presentation, stressed content relevant for the turn-key trainers, acted as excellent role models for them, and kept interest and participation high at training sessions. In addition, they established a good working rapport with participants and fostered

greater communication among the turn-key trainers as a group.

Field consultants also observed sessions with principals, where the coordinators again presented themselves as organized, competent, and most professional in all interactions and discussions.

Program Limitations

Teachers volunteered to attend L.R.P. sessions. These sessions were frequently held at lunch time, or before or after school. As a consequence, the agendas were often limited. Trainers only had time to present an overview of the materials. They had to present brief discussions that could be learned easily and quickly.

Turn-key trainers reported that active principal support of the program increased teacher participation at the six sessions and enhanced participants' interest. Level of interest in, and support of the program varied among participating principals, however.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Teachers' knowledge and attitudes were assessed on a pre-test administered at the first session and a post-test administered at the final session. The turn-key trainers were expected to administer the evaluation instruments. Because of their unfamiliarity with these procedures and because of teacher attrition, they only collected both pre- and post-data from a small number of participants. An analysis of the results is based on four sets of scores (i.e., pre and post results on knowledge and attitudes).

The following represents the final count of the participants' responses:

	Number of Responses
Knowledge Pre-test	239
Knowledge Post-test	97
Attitude Pre-test	272
Attitude Post-test	139

Of these response forms, there were 25 complete sets of pre-and post-tests on both measures. There were 30 complete sets of attitude inventories and 25 sets of knowledge questionnaires. The low response rate severely limits both the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Participants who completed both administrations of attitude and knowledge showed little change in either. Because their pretest scores were higher than participants who did not complete the post-test, they appear to constitute a biased sample. That is, at the outset their interest, knowledge, and attitudes had been greater than that of the general population of participants. These differences suggest that a higher response rate might have yielded greater change from the pretest to the posttest.

TABLE 1

Achievement of Program and Comparison Groups
on Knowledge and Attitude Inventories

	Pre-test			Post-test		
Group	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Program						
Groups with only one set of pre-post data:						
Knowledge data only	214	5.50	2.25	72	6.92	2.08
Attitude data only	242	23.38	4.58	103	26.26	3.86
Groups with pre-post data on both measures:						
Knowledge	25	6.68	1.59	25	7.00	1.67
Attitude	30	25.68	4.45	30	25.00	3.81
Program groups aggregated:						
Knowledge	239	6.10	2.03	97	6.96	1.88
Attitude	272	24.42	4.49	139	25.52	3.87
Comparison						
Knowledge				39	8.9	1.3

TABLE 2

Significance of the Difference Between
Pre-and Post-Test Scores for Program and Comparison Groups

Group	T value	p
Program Group: Knowledge Only	3.30	.01
Program Group: Attitude Only	2.67	.02
Total Program Comparison/Knowledge	5.10	.01
Total Program Group/Knowledge	3.08	----
Total Program Group/Attitude	1.39	----
Program Group (both measures)/ Knowledge	.97	----
Program Group (both measures) Attitude	.61	----

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation of the 1983-84 L.R.P. program has indicated that the program generally met its goal of providing school personnel with information about skills necessary to facilitate the movement of students into less restrictive placements. Because the program was field-based and utilized coordinators working closely with school personnel, L.R.P. could be responsive to the immediate needs of these teachers and admin istrators. In addition, staffing patterns proved beneficial to the program's implementation. Increased feedback from participants in each school made it possible to modify program content as needed.

Direct observations by O.E.A. personnel revealed that the L.R.P. coordinators were highly effective in providing teacher trainers with the necessary content and materials. Interviews with teacher trainers and school principals again revealed the coordinators to be organized, competent, and most professional in all interactions and discussions.

Obstacles to the program's complete success included the following: no funds for volunteer teachers, resulting in lunch time training sessions; and varied levels of interest in, and support of, the project by participating principals assigned to L.R.P.

Not all teacher participants completed all four data collection forms. On the basis of the relatively small sample collected, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about participants' increased knowledge and awareness of mainstreaming. The conclusions based upon the findings of this evaluation lead to the following recommendations:

- maintain and expand the on-site trainer-of-trainers model;

- provide more intensive training to enable trainers to fully master the content they will be expected to impart to their colleagues;
- schedule meetings after regular school hours and compensate teachers for their time; and
- explore ways of eliciting principal commitment to the goals of the program.